

Faith and Politics:

Rwanda, a Case History

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DOI: 10.7252/Paper.000079

"You have heard that bishops were killed, priests were killed, Christians suffer, but *the church lives*. Satan is jealous because there were so many Christians in the country," Archbishop Augustin Nshamihigo of Rwanda tells his Afro-Anglican colleagues after leaving Rwanda for (former) Zaire and eventually Nairobi. The devil has retaliated with pain and death in Rwanda due to *the success* of the church, elaborates Nshamihigo.¹ The 1994 genocide in Rwanda claimed the lives of more than eight hundred thousand men, women and children. The genocidal war-machine mobilized and slaughtered people at a higher rate than that of Nazi Germany. Satan, as Nshamihigo surmises, is the easy target regarding such cataclysmic evil.

Yet, what should we infer from Nshamihigo's comment regarding the devil retaliating because of the Church's "success?" Gary Sheer, a missionary to Rwanda, questions the 'success' of the Church in Rwanda in his article "Rwanda: Where was the church?"² After the genocide, Sheer understandably ponders what influence the church should have had to countermand such vitriolic evil. Why did the Church seemingly fail at such a critical hour? Sheer believes that we must now ponder, question, and wrestle regarding the church and what happened. What can we learn today from the Church in Rwanda? In this paper I will argue that the Christian faith must govern "all of life" and can find its entry point through the social/economic/political aspirations of its people. To accomplish this task, I will address the historical background of Rwanda. I will then highlight the significant role of the East African Revival upon the Rwandan Church, celebrating its strengths but more importantly (for this paper), citing its deficiencies. I will address the controversial but highly significant role of politics as it relates to the Christian faith, also discussing the Church's mission of justice and love. I will conclude with the need for the Church of Rwanda to repent of her shame and failure to the people of Rwanda.

Rwanda is comprised of three people groups: Twa, Hutu, Tutsi. These three groups lived together for centuries, sharing the same language and culture. The Twa are believed to have been the first people to live in the region of Rwanda. Of pygmoid background, they generally lived in the forests and hunted for animals. The Hutu, the majority of the population, traditionally cultivated the soil. The Hutu

1 Jeanie Wylie-Kellerman, "Differing Views on Rwanda," *The Witness*, Volume 78, Number 6, June 1995, pg. 14. Italics mine.

2 Gary Sheer, "Rwanda: Where was the church?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Volume 31, No. 3, July 1995, pgs. 326 – 328.

resemble the peoples of Uganda and Tanzania. The Tutsi were known for cattle herding. Most scholars speculate that they arrived in Rwanda somewhere between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries from Ethiopia. Europeans in the late nineteenth century romanticized these three groups. The Twa were considered lowly, described as similar to the apes whom they chased in the forest. The Hutu were described as simple people who liked to laugh and were generally short in stature. The Tutsi were considered as superior beings, characterized as tall, thin, intelligent, refined, capable of incredible self-control, of goodwill, and as natural leaders.

These European characterizations of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa had a profound impact upon the *Banyarwanda*³ people themselves. For sixty years of colonial rule, the Tutsi self-identity was inflated while the Hutu identity was crushed.⁴ Gerard Prunier, author of *The Rwanda Crisis, History of a Genocide* concludes,

If we combine these subjective feelings with the objective political and administrative decisions of the colonial authorities favouring one group over the other, we can begin to see how a very dangerous social bomb was almost absent-mindedly manufactured throughout the peaceful years of *abazungu* [white] domination.⁵

Thus, we find that the racially obsessed Europeans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century built an artificial construct of the Rwandan people which governed their relations with them. This construct was even exploited by adept Rwandans.

Socially, the early white explorers were struck by the significance of kingship. The *mwami* (king, always a Tutsi) lived at the center of the royal court and was treated as a divine being. The king had power over life and death. Yet, as Prunier contends, he was only the apex of a large and complex pyramid of political, economic, and social relationships.⁶ Social mobility was possible through the institution of “*ububake*,” whereby a Hutu (lower class) could work for a Tutsi (higher class) in exchange for a cow.⁷ A Hutu could actually become a Tutsi if he gained

3 *Banyarwanda* is the term used for the people of Rwanda in their mother tongue, *Ikinyarwanda*.

4 I have not included the Twa here as the main focus of “ethnic rivalry” was between the Tutsi and the Hutu. The Twa were looked down upon by both groups.

5 Gerard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis, History of a Genocide*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995. pg. 9.

6 Prunier, 12.

7 Cows serve as the primary source of wealth in traditional Rwandan society. If there is famine, a cow will help a family survive for a longer duration.

enough cattle; thus, social boundaries were permeable. Moreover, war served as a “social coagulant” for the *Banyarwanda* (Hutu, Tutsi, Twa) and *Kubandwa* cult religion also brought the three groups together.⁸

As Africa was carved up by European powers in the late nineteenth century, Germany was given authority over the region of Rwanda. Germans were somewhat laissez-faire in their approach and basically ruled through the king. German presence was short-lived as Rwanda was transferred to Belgian control in 1916. Belgian authority was different from that of Germany in that Belgium *cared*. While Rwanda was just a small area and ill-considered by the Germans, Belgium was pleased with her new African colony and sought to develop her. The Belgians favored the Tutsi and worked with them to control the society. Thus, Tutsi were given favor and privilege. The Hutu, conversely, suffered under a cruel forced labor system. The Belgians tightened the formerly porous social boundaries as a means of “divide and rule.”

Though Christian conversion initially grew slowly in the 1920s in Rwanda with converts coming from the margins of society, Christianity became like “a white man’s *ubuhake* system” to those who sought conversion.⁹ The astute Tutsi realized that to survive changes set by the white man, it behooved them to convert to the Christian faith. Thus, a massive wave of converts flooded the Catholic Church. The Belgian authorities and religious leaders deposed King Musinga in 1931, replacing him with one of his sons, Mutara III Rudahigwa. Rudahigwa eventually converted to Christianity and would consecrate his country to Christ the King. Thus, writes Tharcisse Gatwa, a journalist from Rwanda and author of the article “Victims or Guilty,” this event illustrates perfectly the marriage between Church and Crown.¹⁰

By 1932 the Catholic Church became the main social institution of Rwanda, overseeing hundreds of thousands of Rwandan converts. The Catholic Church had a monopoly on education, thus providing the means to develop an integrated and highly developed administrative apparatus. Yet, as Prunier deftly intuits, “Rwandese society under the influence of the church became if not truly virtuous, then at least conventionally hypocritical.”¹¹ Shrewdly, Rwandans played the role the colonizers

8 Prunier, 15.

9 Prunier, 31.

10 Tharcisse Gatwa, “Victims or Guilty? Can the Rwandan Churches Repent and Bear the Burden of the Nation for the 1994 Tragedy?” *International Review of Mission*, Volume 88, 1999, pg. 356.

11 Prunier, 32.

wished them to play, mostly for their own survival. Reasons for conversion were basically social and political. Thus, in many ways true Christianity did not penetrate deeply into the hearts and minds of the Rwandese people.

Social and political winds began to change after 1945. As Belgian administration pushed the Rwandan people into individual economic agents, this drive led to independent thinking. Control of the church was slipping from white control as the Tutsi were beginning to embrace ideas such as ethnic equality and self-government;¹² these themes posed a tremendous threat to their Belgian overlords. As social relationships became grimmer, the Catholic Church began to favor the growth of a Hutu counter-elite. Furthermore, the leadership in the Belgian clergy was changing, reflecting more humble social origins which sympathized with the suppressed Hutu majority. The Hutu slowly began to organize themselves into societies and organizations, now feeling support from the Catholic Church.¹³ Against all odds, notes Tharsisse Gatwa, the colonial officials and the Catholic Church converted to the Hutu cause. Gatwa believes this change had less to do with the new outlook of the Catholic clergy and was based more upon political motivations, namely the Church's desire to maintain a position of domination.¹⁴ Regardless, this change in allegiance eventually led to the infamous "social revolution" of 1959 which changed the entire social and political landscape of Rwanda, inaugurating waves of open hostility between Hutu and Tutsi which dominated all aspects of life for the next forty years and culminated in the 1994 genocide.

In the midst of these political rivalries and dubious motives regarding conversion to the Christian faith, there shone a strong and powerful light which cannot be overlooked. In the 1930s, the fires of revival were strong and powerful throughout East Africa, starting in Gahini, Rwanda, and emanating outward. Pioneer missionaries and inquisitive Africans sought a deeper level of holiness. They sought to "walk in the light," living holy and devout lives. This movement became popularly known as the East African Revival. The Revival lasted for many years and resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s. In a journal article written about the East African Revival, Richard Gehman remarks that this revival is one of the most remarkable movements of the Holy Spirit in the Christian Church.¹⁵ The Revival

12 Prunier, 41 - 43.

13 Prunier, 45.

14 Gatwa, 357.

15 Richard Gehman, "The East African Revival," *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 5 no. 1, 1986, pgs. 36 – 56.

spread through Rwanda and Uganda into neighboring countries and changed thousands of lives. People were transformed and began living highly moral lives. Denominations marked by nominal faith were deeply affected. This movement remained vital fifty years after its inception.¹⁶

The East African Revival had many strengths. It did not become a separate movement but remained within the churches. It was evangelical and evangelistic. It broke down walls between Hutu and Tutsi. It promoted lay involvement. It was noted for strong fellowship. Jocelyn Murray, in her case study of the East African Revival, positively notes that missionaries and Africans were on equal terms; both were concerned with personal holiness.¹⁷ Dr. Noel Quinton (N.Q.) King, professor of religious studies at Makerere University College in Uganda, stressed the “overwhelmingly important” fact that this movement was a joint effort between both Africans and Europeans.¹⁸ He commended the indigenous nature of the movement, possessing an African particularity. In churches dominated by Europeans, Africans were able to demonstrate leadership and exhibit their ability to maintain even higher standards than their European counterparts. King recognized the Revival’s potential to “save the day in East Africa.”¹⁹

While the East African Revival helped people live holy lives, it did not emphasize the role of faith in the public/political arena. This theme was its major deficiency. Although it broke down ethnic walls, it lacked a strong social engagement to justice and concern for those unjustly treated. Looking back after the 1994 genocide, one church elder confesses that none of the churches condemned the massacres.²⁰ Mugemera, a Rwandan pastor, admits to the shame of the church. The church in Rwanda lost its prophetic mission. Church leaders had become “sycophants to the authorities.” No one from the churches had spoken against the violence from 1959 onward.²¹ Antoine Rutayisire, a Rwandan Anglican pastor and former Team Leader of African Evangelistic Enterprise (AEE) Rwanda, directs

16 Gehman, 36.

17 Jocelyn Murray, “The East African Revival: A Case Study,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 15 Winter/Spring 1997, pgs. 62 – 68.

18 Noel Quinton King, “The East African Revival Movement and Evangelism,” *Ecumenical Review* 20 April 1968, pgs. 152 – 162.

19 King, 162.

20 Hugh McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us, The Rwandan Tragedy and the Churches*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1995. pg. 73.

21 McCullum, pg. 75.

blame at the church for seeing trouble brewing but doing nothing; the church, he says, even consented to and participated in ethnic division and hostility.²²

Why was the church so thoroughly impotent in the face of ethnic animosity and tension? Was the message of personal holiness emphasized by missionary revivalist Joe Church and his African counterparts in the 1930s enough? Antoine says no. While he believes that the Revival rightly attacked social vices such as theft, drunkenness, adultery, jealousy, etc., it did so at the expense of social issues which were considered outside the sphere of God's grace.²³ Meg Guillebaud, a third generation missionary in Rwanda, writes in her book *Rwanda, The Land God Forgot?* that early missionaries discouraged Rwandans from getting involved in public life due to the fear of corruption. Missionaries at that time were heirs to a theological controversy which led them to emphasize evangelism rather than public engagement, being critical of social/political involvement.²⁴

Roger Bowden, then General Secretary of Mid-Africa Ministry (MAM) of the Church Mission Society (CMS) stated in his J.C. Jones Lecture in 1995 that Rwanda had operated with a "privatized" and inadequate view of sin. He stipulated that the Revival doctrine of sin underestimated the depth and power of sin in its structural and corporate nature.²⁵ Robert Walker, writing for the BBC, wonders whether the church deserves more culpability after the 1994 cataclysm. The church hierarchy not only failed to denounce dissemination of ethnic hatred but even supported the regime which ultimately exacted suffering of such mammoth proportions.²⁶ As Bowden concludes, the personal and private nature of sin as understood from the Revival didn't prepare the church to corporately stand against evil structures within the government and the larger society. The church in its infancy and immaturity didn't understand that it possessed a prophetic voice to speak out. Those who applaud early missionary endeavors also stand in consternation after the 1994 Rwanda genocide. It seems that while the East African Revival emphasized personal holiness and simple faith, it lacked a more fully orbed theology which

22 Carl Lawrence, *Rwanda, A walk through darkness...into light*, Vision House Publishing, Inc., Gresham, OR, 1995. pg. 137.

23 Lawrence, pg. 138.

24 Meg Guillebaud, *Rwanda, The Land God Forgot?, Revival, Genocide and Hope*, Monarch Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pgs. 323 – 324.

25 Guillebaud, 323.

26 Robert Walker, Rwanda's religious reflections, BBC Kigali, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3561365.stm>, 4/20/07.

would have equipped the Church to stand tall and speak out, countermanding the vitriol of ethnic rivalry.

With the East African Revival, Rwandans were authentically changed by the Gospel. It was more than the facade. Something deep and meaningful *had* transpired in the hearts and minds of thousands of Rwandans from the 1930s onward. When Archbishop Augustin Nshamihigo referred to the “success” of the church in Rwanda, he may have been alluding to the legacy of the East African Revival. He may also have been alluding to the high percentage of Rwandans who confessed Christianity as their religion.²⁷ Yet, others are less convinced about the “success” of the church. The obvious question must now be offered, how could genocide happen in such a “Christianized” country?

From the historical perspective, there is an easy explanation. The Catholic Church (in particular, but not alone) permitted and enabled nominal Christianity. The Rwandan population was keen enough to understand that conversion to the Church meant opportunity, financial and otherwise. Christianity in this sense was essentially superficial. Worse, the Church sided with those in positional places of power. Originally they worked with the Tutsi, but when political winds changed they sided with the Hutu. Although they seemed to have created a model “Christian nation” in the heart of Africa, this “model” turned into a nightmarish hell for the Rwandan people. “Where was the Church in 1994?” asks Gary Sheer and so many others. The Church was present, but it wasn’t triumphant. While we cannot expect perfection this side of eternity, we can hope for a Church that reflects the character of God regarding justice, mercy, and love. Wolfgang Schonecke, addressing the Rwandan tragedy to the AMECEA Churches of East Africa, writes that the Rwandan experience poses urgent questions regarding the model of Church in Africa inherited from missionaries. He cites the lack of rootedness of the Church to Rwandan culture. He postulates a need for “radical inculturation.”²⁸ But what does this “radical inculturation” look like and what does it mean?

For starters, Christianity must govern “all of life.” One significant area of life it must be in relation with is the social/political arena. Politics is a pervasive reality. Economic and social structures are largely governed by politics. We find this

27 Most figures put this number at 90%, with 65% Catholic and 25% Protestant.

28 Fr. Wolfgang Schonecke, “What Does the Rwanda Tragedy Say to AMECEA Churches?”, *AMECEA Documentation Service*, ADS 17/1994, No. 424. September 15th, 1994. pg. 6.

evident in the Rwanda story. The political influence of Belgium drastically altered the social and economic structures and even the very fiber of Rwandan society. Belgian political and administrative domination affected how Rwandans felt about the Christian religion. In his article “Politics and theology in Africa,” Laurenti C. Magesa maintains that political systems strongly determine economic, social and even religious structures in Africa. These elements are all closely linked. Thus, contends Magesa, political realities should be central to doing theology as politics pervades human life.²⁹

This notion finds biblical precedent. When Jeremiah spoke his highly unpopular prophetic message to Judah, he referred to the very real political realities which threatened to undo their nation. The Gospels make us aware of the political world Jesus faced during his earthly ministry. The region of Galilee was ruled by Herod the Tetrarch under the imperial jurisdiction of Rome. When Jesus spoke of the cross, one cannot doubt that he had seen crosses litter the landscape to remind the Jewish people the punishment that would befall them if they rebelled. Paul benefited politically in being a Roman citizen. He could travel freely and he was exonerated due to his citizenship status. He appealed to the higher governing authorities when he was in a bind. Political situations have had a definitive influence upon the Church. Early persecution sparked theological understanding of what it means to live and *die* for Christ. Thus, political situations make up a significant factor in the life of the Church and theological thought.³⁰

Today, a concern dominating African theology is the inculturation of the Gospel.³¹ Magesa believes that evangelism must be done *ad modum recipientis*, that is, it must consider the cultural context of its recipients. Understanding culture must be rooted within the complex web of socio-political-religious relationships. Although culture cannot be reduced to political systems, politics, understood as that which regulates human relationships, is the principle which unites and underlies all other areas of life in the world.³² Thus,

the political aspect or principle of life in Africa today, offers easier
access to comprehending the socio-cultural, economic and religious

29 Laurenti C. Magesa, “Politics and theology in Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review*, 31, 1989/3, pg. 147. When this article was written, Laurenti Magesa was a lecturer in Moral Theology at the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa (CHIEA).

30 Magesa, 148.

31 Magesa, 146.

32 Magesa, 147.

aspects. It is ... a more direct and relevant source of apposite theology, theology germane to today's African needs, demands, and expectations, particularly since independence.³³

Politics is a critical entry point for theology in Africa. Christianity must be understood as more than just a private faith or a quest for personal holiness. Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom seeks the well-being of people and strives towards justice and love. Jesus' mission was to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to those in bondage, to bring sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim God's goodness and mercy (Luke 45: 18 – 19). These actions have political import. Though Jesus was not a political revolutionary per se, his revolution of love and justice encompassed all of life which includes the political realm. Thus, when he began to upset the powers and structures of his day, particularly as he challenged the temple system (Luke 19: 45 – 47), he suffered a political death on the cross at the hands of the Romans by means of the connivance of the Jewish religious leaders. "The greatest moments of the history of salvation," writes Magesa, "are significantly set within the political context."³⁴ The politics of the Kingdom of God which Jesus embodied crashed head on with the politics of Israel and Rome. As Magesa deduces, the political dimension of the Kingdom of God will inevitably impinge upon the politics of the (secular) State.³⁵

Has Africa taken seriously its politics as a source of theology? Does the Church understand its role on a continent riddled with political upheaval, poverty, tribalism, AIDS, war, debt, fear and a perpetual sense of hopelessness? The Church of Africa has a wonderful opportunity to show that Christianity is concerned with "all of life" and that God works in the midst of any political/social/economic reality. African theology should act as a "conscience moving factor,"³⁶ influencing all members of society to refuse cruelty and oppression in all spheres of life. Although the Kingdom of God and the Church are not equivalent in nature, the Church's role is to be the primary agent of God's Kingdom. Thus, the role of the Church is to bring freedom from oppression in all spheres of life: social, economic, political.

Members of the revival fellowship from the East African Revival did not see their role as one of repairing or reconstructing the fabric of society. Rather,

33 Magesa, 151.

34 Magesa, 146.

35 Magesa, 152.

36 Magesa, 158.

they saw themselves as members of a new community which would be a prophetic witness to the larger society. These dear brothers and sisters are not alone in their theological perspective. Different Christian groups throughout history have distanced themselves from “secular society,” desiring to call others into their experience that transcends ordinary cultural, socio-economic and tribal barriers. While indeed this viewpoint has New Testament precedence, I agree with John Vernon Taylor, author of *Christianity and Politics in Africa*, that it is only part of the truth. Taylor contends that Christianity divorced from the overall developing life of the community will never do for Africa. Separation between Church and society goes against African tradition and sentiment where all of life is bound up together. Furthermore, it would be disastrous for those who are politically aware to disassociate themselves from the Church. Christianity is as concerned with the things of this world as with the things to come.³⁷

George Ernest Wright, author of *The Biblical Doctrine of Man in Society*, agrees. “Our responsibility,” he writes, “is in the here and now, and there must be no evasion of it.”³⁸ Furthermore, he elucidates that the Christian’s responsibility is to have an active, responsible, and positive role in the life of the world.³⁹ Joseph Fison makes the interesting observation that the Christian faith is a “materialistic faith.” Embodied man has met with embodied God and with embodied nature. He argues against the “pie in the sky when you die” mentality.⁴⁰ While an eschatological hope in the renewal of all things is healthy for Christian life and witness, Fison’s point regarding the “physicality” and the “earthiness” of our faith is significant. He heeds us to take stock of Hugel’s warning to not become so enamored with grace that we despise nature (the here and now).⁴¹

Taylor elaborates that God calls men and women; he doesn’t call “souls.” God calls us to be responsible for our communities, to proactively shape the events of history, and to pattern society according to the laws of His Kingdom. God’s Kingdom and its politics should serve as the “leaven” in human society; as citizens of heaven, we are not called to retreat but to engage responsibly as

37 John Vernon Taylor, *Christianity and Politics in Africa*, Greenwood Press, Publishers, Westport, Connecticut, 1957, pgs. 18 – 21.

38 George Ernest Wright, *The Biblical Doctrine of Man in Society*, SCM Press Ltd, London 1954, pg. 137.

39 Wright, 150.

40 Joseph Edward Fison, *The Christian Hope*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1954, pg. 50.

41 Fison, 50.

citizens of this world.⁴² The Church in society must be different but involved. The Church, according to Taylor, must bring both judgment and creative participation to society. The Church serves in judgment as a prophetic voice; it engages and participates creatively by co-opting with the State in the promotion of welfare for citizens and removing economic and civil wrongs.⁴³ Taylor concludes that there are risks involved in responsibility. The arena of national politics in particular presents dangers and temptations of a subtle kind. Yet, he challenges, *someone* must stand in this place of spiritual danger. Who better, than the Christian?⁴⁴

A core element of the Church's mission is one of justice. According to Gary Haugen, author of *Good News About Injustice*, injustice happens when power is misused to take from others what God has given them: life, dignity, liberty, the fruit of their love and labor.⁴⁵ As Christians, because the love of God is in us, we are all called to do something about injustice. The most crucial role, Haugen argues, lies with shepherds and teachers in the Body of Christ. Our leaders must teach us about our God of justice so that we can follow Him in the struggle against injustice.⁴⁶ Furthermore, our leaders need to lead by example in word and deed in this struggle. Guillebaud writes, "Had the church [and her leaders] not kept silent in the face of the assassinations which led up to the genocide, or the injustice for the forgotten refugees in Uganda who eventually invaded as the RPF, the horror of the Genocide may not have ever happened."⁴⁷ Furthermore, had the Church and her leaders listened to the cries of the Hutu suffering under forced labor and spoken out against such cruelty during Belgian rule, the cycle of injustice and pain would have been broken earlier.

Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania, speaks prophetically with a clarion call regarding the role of the Church. The Church, he says, sometimes must co-opt with the government and authorities to help the people. At other times the Church must work in opposition to those same powers and authorities. Always the Church must be on the side of social justice, helping people to live and

42 Taylor, 21, 27.

43 Taylor, 30 – 31.

44 Taylor, 34.

45 Gary Haugen, *Good News About Injustice*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1999, pg. 72.

46 Haugen, 175 - 176.

47 Guillebaud, 330.

work together for their common good.⁴⁸ William Temple, author of *Christianity and the Social Order*, concedes that when the Christian Church makes her voice heard concerning political and economic matters, resentment is often felt, even from Christians. He attributes this sentiment to the modern and “enlightened” idea that religion is only one department of life, like Art or Science. It is assumed that the Church exercises little influence and should exercise none.⁴⁹ Yet, regarding the important social issues of his day, Temple says that in the name of justice Christians cannot ignore such challenges. The Church has been commissioned to carry out the purposes of God. As the “Body of Christ” we are to be an instrument of His will. Thus, we are obliged to ask what the will of God is concerning every field of human activity. Finding God’s purpose for every sphere of life is the role of the Church. If there has been deviation, the Church’s role is to bring restoration. Thus, the Church “is bound to ‘interfere,’” argues Temple.⁵⁰

Laurenti C. Magesa and other Developing World theologians and scholars such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Desmond Tutu, argue that the quest for justice is a “biblical mandate.”⁵¹ The Kingdom of God is one of justice. Thus, the duty of theology is to advance the “biblical mandate” of justice. While theologians who advocate for justice will be accused of “meddling in politics,” they must be faithful to this calling and task, sharing Christ’s ministry to bring good news to the poor and setting the oppressed free. This proclamation of the Gospel to the poor will not endear one to the unscrupulous politician. When positions of power are threatened, politicians will misinterpret the liberating work of the Church as “interference in politics.” Politicians often understand politics as self-serving. Yet, the Church must speak prophetically against unwarranted domination over the helpless, the weak, and the exploited. Civil ruler’s impunity and abuse of power must be challenged.⁵²

Unfortunately, in Rwanda we find an example of the failure of the Church to embrace this prophetic call. Wolfgang Schonecke makes a credible critique of the Church in Rwanda, stipulating that despite countless acts of individual heroism, a Church that doesn’t openly and honestly address its own ethnic tensions cannot speak to society with a united and trustworthy voice. Furthermore, regarding

48 Adrian Hastings, *African Christianity*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1976, pg. 86.

49 William Temple, *Christianity and the Social Order*, Penguin Books, Baltimore, 1942, pg. 13.

50 Temple, 24 – 25.

51 Magesa, 143.

52 Magesa, 143 – 145.

reconciliation, the Church cannot work effectively in this vein for the betterment of society until it addresses its own cultural and ethnic tension.⁵³ Tharcisse Gatwa recognizes that the Church as well as the whole of society in Rwanda have been victims of the genocide. Yet, he also suggests that Church failed to provide spiritual and moral guidance before and after independence in Rwanda. The church hierarchy either declined to see the misery and suffering of victims or blamed others for being responsible.⁵⁴ Churches not only refused to hear the cries of the victims of injustice, some even contributed in shaping policies and a model of society which was blatantly based upon discrimination. The true mission of the Church was in short supply as churches became allies to oppressive elites, silent to the call of God, and utterly blind to God's presence among the suffering.⁵⁵

Yet, there is a way forward. The Church of Rwanda must consider the ways in which she needs to both confess and repent, renewing her covenant with God and recapturing a measure of trustworthiness. One practical way the Church can help the larger society recover its integrity is to address the fundamental question of a distorted history, a manufactured "Rwandese ideology," handed to them by the social Darwinist theories brought to them by Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Secondly, the Church must also repent. According to Gatwa, some church leaders believe that because the church is "holy," only individuals ought to repent. For Christians, argues Gatwa, to desist from repentance is a denial of identity. Citing the tradition of apostolic succession in the Catholic Church, Gatwa alludes to a significant dimension in the life of Peter (the pillar of the church) - his repentance for denying Jesus. In fact, Peter became the pillar *because* of his repentance. Likewise, contends Gatwa, the future of Rwanda rests with those who repent of their guilt and cowardice. Confession of guilt and repentance are of paramount importance. Moreover, such repentance must take on a corporate nature. The Church of Rwanda must face up to its failures. Such repentance, although it will not absolve individual or corporate culpability, will pave the way for grace and healing, will open up communication, will establish new relationships and community, will eradicate evil, and will prevent the transmission of evil from this generation to the next.⁵⁶

53 Schonecke, 3.

54 Gatwa, 359, 361.

55 Gatwa, 360.

56 Gatwa, 359, 361 – 362.

In conclusion, the Christian faith must govern “all of life” and can find its entry point in Rwanda through the social/economic/political aspirations of its people. While the East African Revival powerfully affected thousands upon thousands of lives in Rwanda, its major deficiency was that it did not emphasize the role of faith in the public/political arena. Christianity must be understood and prophetically lived out within its given political context. The Church’s mission is one of justice. The Church of Rwanda has the opportunity to repent of her shame and failure, and now find her prophetic voice in all spheres of life.